TESSA
TEACHER EDUCATION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Formative Evaluation Report

by

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Acknowledgements

The evaluators acknowledge with grateful thanks the indispensable role of the Open University (OU) in setting up the programme for this evaluation. The OU staff were generous with their time and expertise, and unfailingly helpful – without imposing on, or influencing, the evaluation process and conclusions reached.

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A draft version of this report was circulated for comment amongst key stakeholders. Comment received was favourable. Professor Fred Keraro (Egerton University) and Dr Amani Ibrahim (Open University of Sudan) are particularly thanked for their detailed comments.[1]

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[1] Stakeholder feedback resulted in a small number of technical corrections. At the same time, it is noted that interpretations, inferences and conclusions remain those of the evaluators.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Teacher Education in Sub-Saharan Africa (Tessa) project was initiated in 2005. The project has three specific objectives:

a) create a network of African universities, working alongside The Open University (OU), UK and other international organisations to focus on the education and training needs of teachers in Sub-Saharan Africa;

b) support the exploration and development of school-based modes of teacher education in which teachers develop their competencies and skills to meet the need of pupils in their own classrooms;

c) design and build a multilingual Open Education Resource (OER) bank, modular and flexible in format, that is freely available to all teachers in the region.

At the time of this formative evaluation, TESSA was functioning as a network of national and international organizations led by the OU and comprising 13 institutions in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda and Zambia. Through partnerships and collaborative endeavour, TESSA has created 75 adaptable OER units for primary school teacher training adapted and translated for four languages: Arabic, English, French and Kiswahili. These units model an inclusive activity-based pedagogic approach to teacher and pupil learning.

Evaluation TORs and Process

The present commissioned formative evaluation was carried out by a team of two independent evaluators between May and September 2012. The evaluation sought to enhance understandings of the way TESSA works and its achievements, as well as inform future TESSA activity and sustainability. Further, the evaluation process was intended to be a learning experience for the TESSA community and to make recommendations, informed by local conditions, for programme enhancement. Following the Terms of Reference (ToR), this evaluation was guided by the five issues addressed under 'Key Findings' below.

In line with the ToR, the evaluation employed an in-depth qualitative, open-ended, context-sensitive research design to enable understandings of the influence of the local social contexts and educational realities on the various configurations of TESSA implementation. Research *depth* was provided by in-depth case studies at three TESSA partner institutions, while research *breadth* was afforded by more limited analysis of TESSA activity across all TESSA partner institutions.

Data collection methods involved individual and focus group interviews as well as administration of semi-structured questionnaires to teacher educators and teachers. A total of 141 respondents were interviewed (individually and in focus groups; 110 from partner institutions and 31 from non-partner institutions). The evaluation was also informed by: project documentation as well as research and conference papers published by the Network partners; case studies conducted by Coordinators in each of the partner institutions; and the OU's study of educational policies in the countries of partner institutions. The evaluators have confidence that the pool of evaluation data is sufficiently large, representative, and varied to allow for a credible

evaluation. Overall, the greatest limitation of this evaluation is that no written account can adequately capture and represent the sincerity and passion of the first hand accounts of teacher educators and students who had worked with and experienced the TESSA materials.

Key findings

Partner institutions' 'take up' and use of TESSA

With regard to the question as to how the TESSA OER are being used in each partner institution and the relative success of different models of use, in terms of scale, there has been very considerable 'take up' of TESSA materials. The TESSA OER have been used in programmes with almost 300,000 enrolments of teacher-learners and in-service teachers across a wide range of programmes in all partner institutions. TESSA has taken hold in different kinds of settings and contexts, in different models, and for different purposes. This was evidenced by:

- the varied national policy contexts in which TESSA has thrived;
- a variety of certificate, diploma, and undergraduate degree programmes (both initial and in-service) delivered by partner institutions using TESSA OER and preparing teacher-learners across all phases of schooling;
- deployment of TESSA resources for all core content subject and curriculum areas as well as for both contact and distance modes of teaching;
- TESSA incorporation in both 'highly' and 'loosely' structured modes of curriculum integration;
- use of the OER in the development and delivery of new programmes initiated either by HEIs themselves, or in response to government mandate.

Notwithstanding successful 'take up', sustainability is flagged as an issue to consider. TESSA flourishes in the hearts and minds of teacher educators and their teacher-learners, and is certainly woven into the fabric of faculty practices. Nonetheless, in contact teaching programmes, where TESSA has been incorporated by an individual lecturer, sustainability is potentially threatened by staff mobility. Further, while there is evidence that management in partner universities has been convinced of the merits of TESSA, by and large, TESSA is not formally inscribed in curricula or in faculty statutes or guidelines. By contrast with contact teaching programmes, however, TESSA's security of tenure appears to be assured in the distance programmes (which also account for the great majority of students). In such programmes, the integration of TESSA into curricula in ways that maintain and enhance programme design has involved much staff collaboration in carefully planned and structured processes. Learning materials thus developed are assets not easily discarded.

The influence of TESSA on teacher educators and teacher-learners (identity and practices)

Teacher educators had encountered TESSA in different ways because of their own past experiences as well as their own different locations across the disciplinary/subject areas in teacher education. For some, TESSA was something completely new, and impact was expressed as "an eye opener" or even "a revelation". In the case of those already familiar with the theory and practice of learner-centred, activity-based methods, TESSA reinforced or cemented existing philosophies. Most importantly, the OER provided the means of achieving their ideals. Overall, TESSA has had *significant* impact on the identity and practices of teacher educators and a *profound* impact on those of teacher-learners. It has fused theory and practice; shifted

perceptions from teacher as a "know it all" to "teacher as facilitator of learning"; and greatly enhanced the relevance of pupils' learning experiences. The materials have been used in creative ways to meet the real needs of teachers and learners. Actual use of the materials has by and large represented forms of practice that correspond with best professional practices as described by leading education theorists.

Reasons for this impact, as advanced by teacher educators and teacher-learners, were numerous. They include judgements that TESSA:

- foregrounds and provides the resources and tools for activity-based learning;
- does not begin by providing abstract 'theory', thereby alienating practitioners by placing the onus on them to find their own ways of enacting theory. By simply employing the user-friendly TESSA tools and resources, practitioners are inducted, naturally and almost by default, into best professional practice;
- makes child-centred, activity-based and reflective practice real, and achievable.

TESSA has thus done much more than simply provide materials that are sufficiently generic and policy compliant to be useful in almost any context.

TESSA Networks: type, activities and effects

'Networking' was conceptualised as a powerful means of developing and embedding the project and its resources in partner HEIs and in supporting school-based modes of teacher education. The TESSA network has grown far beyond the original TESSA consortium partner institutions. The diversity and complexity of TESSA networks that have been established between and among TESSA Coordinators/partner institutions and other actors, authorities and initiatives in teacher education and development, reflect not only a legitimate challenge to the traditional model of approaching education reform initiatives from the centre (seat of bureaucracy) to the periphery (grassroots), but also provide a good case study on how to cascade education reform initiatives from the 'bottom' to the 'top' (from the grassroots to the centre). Through networks, education reform (policy in some cases, and practice in most cases) is slowly but steadily being taken to the ministries of education. Positive effects (intended and unintended) of the networks include:

- some faculties have begun working closely with schools, for the first time;
- research has been fused into teaching;
- the principle of activity-based materials for external programmes has been accepted as is the case at Makerere University in Uganda;
- TESSA materials are being used for the training of school inspectors, head teachers, professional teachers, and unqualified as well as volunteer teachers in Ghana;
- colleges of education have been drawn into TESSA networks and OLA College in Ghana, which was not among the original 13 TESSA partner institutions, now presents a case of exemplary TESSA practice;
- TESSA has not only helped inform the national ECD curriculum in Ghana but has also been approved by the Teacher Education Division of the Ghana Education Service;
- vibrant communities of teacher education practice have emerged.

The Role of ICT in enabling or Constraining TESSA

ICT capacities and capabilities have worked both to enable and constrain aspects of TESSA implementation. Where steady, flexible and affordable access to ICTs is enabled, TESSA OER uptake and use has been high. However, in most of the cases, the predominant use of print and CD modes of access to TESSA OER has largely constrained both access and adaptability, and to some extent could undermine anticipated gains in pedagogy. Specifically, lack of ICT infrastructure makes access to the materials more difficult and expensive (thus thwarting the potential of OER to benefit those most in need of free resources). On the other hand, inability to access and use the materials in digital form can limit pedagogy to *adoption* of materials rather than *adaptation* to meet particular needs in particular contexts. This limits opportunity for teacher-learners to exercise their agency in fully developing their professional skills.

An overall judgement on TESSA impact

TESSA is a pioneering project that has tackled, head on, the most intractable of all challenges facing teacher education and schooling in SSA – quality. It has been innovative in merging educational theory and modern technologies into a model that is also strategically pragmatic, and thus workable. It is a highly successful project, achieving its aims at scale. This has immense implications and promise for all teacher education in SSA. The critical key indicators of success include not only significant project 'take up' in diverse settings and the significant impact on the practices and identities of teacher educators and teacher-learners. There has also been substantial impact, through networking, on schooling and other educational agencies. Some degree of impact on ministries of education is evident. Notably, impact has been achieved despite limited ICT infrastructure and expertise.

Issues for taking the project forward

Seven key points/issues were identified for their potential to inform thinking about the future trajectory of the project. The seven issues, not sequenced in order of importance or priority, are:

1. **Retain and build on project logic and research networks** as a way of ensuring a firm foundation for establishing and consolidating TESSA activity. Cementing the research culture at faculty level and extending inter-partner research networking would offer benefits to all stakeholders and also make project participation more attractive to teacher educators, who, as members of the university community, are expected to be productive researchers as well as good teachers.

2. **TESSA in relation to national policy:** Initial fears of disjuncture with national policy occurred mainly where TESSA was understood as content rather than as methodology. In such cases, there were concerns that educations officials might frown on use of TESSA materials. While an objective view suggests that anxieties about TESSA's compliance with national policy were not well founded, perceptions are real in their consequences. The project could use its experience to identify strategies that help allay anxieties about TESSA's compliance with national policy.

3. **The role of Project Coordinator:** Project planning placed heavy reliance on Coordinators. That confidence has been justified, and Coordinators must indeed take the lion's share of credit for project 'take up'. However, there is a fragility associated with reliance on any one individual, and succession issues can lead to project setbacks. They carry the danger of loss of networks as well as of 'institutional memory'. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a very different dynamic that occurs when a Coordinator occupies the role for a long period of

time. While the benefits of such a situation were amply demonstrated during the evaluation - the individual becomes the 'face' of the project to the extent that s/he is seen *as* TESSA, or as the TESSA 'brand'. Should TESSA be seen as a brand? After all, it is a package of accepted theory and best practices – it is not a new theory or paradigm vying for acceptance.

4. **TESSA as part of a fully coherent teacher education programme:** A weakness in some instances of TESSA 'take up' might be that it has operated in isolation of important components like professional studies and educational studies. In order to link theory and practice at the level of course design in a way that would facilitate the curriculum to realize optimal coherence and impact, thought could be given to ways of inserting TESSA *within* rather than *alongside* the rationale or philosophies that underpin programme design. When this is achieved, teacher-learners can truly say, as one Kenyan teacher did: "TESSA is in me."

5. **TESSA and institutional type:** Distance education programmes offer the most promise of being good hosts for TESSA. As institutional types, however, Colleges of Education present themselves as promising sites for TESSA extension, while OLA College – although ironically not a partner institution – was found to be the institution in which TESSA was most deeply embedded.

6. **ICT infrastructure:** As already pointed out, problems in this regard emerged very clearly in the evaluation. It is appreciated that the problem of lack of ICT infrastructure is beyond the control of the project. Nonetheless, *awareness* and *accessibility* remain two key factors that influence and even determine the uptake and utilization of TESSA OER. Future TESSA activities could yield greater impact if they simultaneously target awareness as well as accessibility, including training.

7. **TESSA and (teaching) practice:** Appropriately, the most common form of assessment across partner institutions is related to the practices of teaching. In some, assessment is based entirely on the student's performance in the classroom. How such assessment might be conceptualized and carried out is a matter of key importance. In Nigeria, the NTI has already embarked on such an initiative. There could be much merit in further encouragement for the development of protocols for assessing teaching practice, particularly if it were a collaborative effort across networks that have evolved in the TESSA community.